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Medicinal and sacred plants significance of sacred natural sites Raisen District of Madhya Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The present investigation was carried out in the medicinal sacred plants and some sacred natural sites of Raisen district Madhya Pradesh. Total nine sacred natural site observations Bhojpur Shiv Temple, Parvati Temple, Digambar Jain Temple, Ashapuri Bhootnath Temple, Bhimbetika, Keri Ke Mahadeo, Hinglaj Temple, Dargah Raisen, Sanchi Stupas studied during the year (2021-22), 19 sacred plants belonging 15 families observed. Before temples were constructed, trees were open-air shrines sheltering the deity, and many were symbolic of the Gods our ancestors linked various gods and goddesses with several plants for their conservation and categorized them as sacred plants. These ancient beliefs reveal that the human relationship with medicinal plants was also helpful in the conservation of plant species for their valuable qualities.

Keywords: Sacred plant, medicinal plant, sacred natural site, Raisen

Introduction

Medicinal plants have been utilized for the treatment of various diseases since ancient times, thus forming an important element of aboriginal curative systems. The Indian Rishis first documented the use of medicinal plants in the form of Samhitas. Charak Samhita (1000-800 BC) and Shushrut Samhita (800-700 BC) by Maharshi Charak and Maharshi Shashurut, respectively, are the baselines of the Indian Medicinal System. Maharshi Charak mentioned over 500 medicinal plants, out of which 340 plants are used in the production of herbal medicine Ojha *et al.* (2020) ^[17] they consist of geological formations, distinct landforms, specific ecosystems and natural habitats. These sites include areas recognized as sacred by indigenous people of various religions or faiths as places for worship and remembrance. Where there is a sacred site there is a space and a force for the human beings to live in balance and harmony with themselves, nature and the universe. Sacred natural sites also represent ancient and profound cultural values. These are the places where human culture and wild nature have critically intersected over the last 5000 years of human evolution (Negi *et al.*, 2018). 'Sacred' has different meanings in different communities. At the basic level, it denotes deep respect and 'set aside for purposes of the spiritual or religious. Sacred natural sites are part of a broader set of cultural values that different social groups, traditions, beliefs, or value systems attach to places and which 'fulfill humankind's need to understand, and connect in meaningful ways, to the environment of its origin and nature (Upreti *et al.*, 2017) ^[4].

These sacred natural sites have been well protected over long periods and have seen a low level of disturbance. Tribal communities residing in these places have very poor economical status. So most of them rely on traditional agricultural techniques, traditional food, traditional medicine and traditional healers like Bhagat, Bhumika and Vaidya. The advantage of preferring traditional medicine is that they believe in spiritual power and traditional herbal healers who are found within a short distance, most of them are familiar with the patient's culture, the environment and the cost associated with treatments are very less. They also believe in traditional rituals for their all ceremonies and they often visited specific places called "Deo Khiliyan/Deogudi and Sarnas" Which are situated in remote forest areas, hilly places, and agricultural fields. For indigenous and local communities these natural areas have provided the focus for many of their spiritual traditions and are recognized as sacred. SNS of all kinds has played a key role in the creation of distinct places that record natural and cultural histories and provide a sense of identity (Bajpayee, *et al.*, 2019).

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Sacred plants are also considered to be incarnations or symbols of God or deities and therefore their worship became more common. They play a very important role in the myths and customs of India. Without the use of sacred plants and their products, the religious and cultural rituals are not completed (Pandey and Pandey, 2016) [18]. About two thousand plants are mentioned in the Ayurvedic, Unani and Tibbi systems of medicine. People rendered divine honor and worshiped trees and plants. Probably, tree worship is one of the earliest forms of religion in Ancient India. The sacred value of plants has been well documented. (Sahu *et al.*) The trend of sacred plant worshipping was also present during the Vedic period (Bhatla *et al.*, 1984). Hindu scriptures tell us that a wide range of sacred plants like, Ashoka, Banyan, Bel, China rose, Datura, Doob grass, Hemp, Justicia, Madar, Mango, Marigold, Musa, Neem, Peepal, Periwinkle, Rice, Tulsi, Nariyal, Lotus, Sandal and Turmeric, etc. have divine qualities, hence used in some religious activities and rituals from marriage, baptism to health care systems (Robinson and Cush, 1997). Such divine plants have been recorded in the religious books and their knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation (Verma, 2018) [31].

Raisen

The Raisen district is situated between the latitude 22°47' and 23°33'; North and longitude 77°21 and 78°49 East. It is bounded in the west by Sehore district, in the north by Vidisha district, in the east and southeast by Sagar district, in the southeast by Narismhapur district, and in the south by Hoshangabad and Sehore districts. The total area of the district is 8,395 km² which contains 1.93% of the state's total area (Ahmad *et al.* 2013), Raisen District takes its name from a massive Fort. This fort is built on a sandstone hill, at the foot of which settles the town. The name is probably a corruption of Rajavasini or Rajasayan, the royal residence. The climate of the Raisen district is characterized by a hot summer and general dryness except during the southwest monsoon season. The year may be divided into four seasons. The cold season, December to February is followed by the hot season from March to about the middle of June. The period from the middle of June to September is in the southwest monsoon season. October and November form the post-monsoon or transition period. The normal rainfall in the Raisen district is 1207.3 mm. It receives maximum rainfall during the southwest monsoon period. About 92.2% of the annual rainfall is received during monsoon seasons. Only 7.8 % of the annual rainfalls take place during October to May period. The surplus water for groundwater recharge is available only during the southwest monsoon period. The maximum rainfall received in the district at Udaipura *i.e.* 1389.8 mm and the minimum at Bareli *i.e.* 1150.3 mm. The normal maximum temperature received during May is 41.5

°C. and minimum during January is 6.8 °C. The normal annual means maximum and minimum temperature of the Raisen district is 32.0 °C and 17.5 °C respectively. During the southwest monsoon season, the relative humidity generally exceeds 87% (August month). In rest of the year is drier. The driest part of the year is the summer season when relative humidity is less than 29%. April is the driest month of the year. The wind velocity is higher during the pre-monsoon period as compared to the post-monsoon period. The maximum wind velocity of 10.8 km/hr was observed during June and is a minimum of 2.2 km/hr during December. The average normal annual wind velocity of the Raisen district is 5.9 km/hr. (Fig- 1.1) The soils of the district are locally classed into six types depending upon their appearance and crop bearing. The superior Kalmat is a loamy soil of black colour, when dry it becomes very hard and developed cracks, but when wet it is soft and clayey. It remains moist for a considerable period. This soil is found on hillsides and in the areas occupied by the Deccan Lava flows. It is suited to wheat, Masur and gram. Bhanwar is a gray-colored soil, a mixture of Kalmat and Soyar soils. It is loose textured and retains moisture considerably. Soyar or Pitula is a yellow or brownish colour, shallow in thickness, large to small pebbles and is found on the slope of hills. Siari is a poor soil of grey yellowish or reddish black colour. It is loose and sandy in the constitution. If irrigated, it suits to grow rice. It is shallow and does not retain much moisture. Bharwa is a light, sandy shallow soil of black or brown color. It is found mostly in the foothills. It grows only the inferior crops. Kachar or Chap is an excellent loamy soil found in the banks and beds of streams. It grows fine crops of wheat, jawar and vegetable. CGWB, (2013) The district lies in the drainage basins of the Ganga and Narmada rivers. There is no perennial river in the district. Although, the Betwa River originates from here the benefit is not available to the district. Narmada River flows and irrigation facilities are available in Bareli Tehsil. Bina, Halali, Neon, Basna, Khand, Tadni, Bawas and Dhaman are other small rivers flowing in the district. In the summer season, these rivers become dry. This is one of the main drawbacks of the fast development of the district. The northern portion of the district is drained by the perennial Betwa and Bina rivers and their tributaries while the southern part of the district is drained by the southerly flowing Sindori, Tendani, and Barna rivers and their tributaries ultimately joining the Narmada river which carries a large volume of water throughout the year and forms about half of the southern boundary of the district. Quite a handful of tribes reside in every corner of the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. The tribal community Gond, Bhils, Pradhan, Agariya, Ojha, Nagarchi and Solhas have settled down in villages (Lone *et al.*, 2015)



Map 1: The map is showing the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh India

Methodology

The present investigation studies sacred plants and their ethnomedicinal value from some selected Sacred Natural Sites of Raisen district (Madhya Pradesh) and their relationship with indigenous people and their religious beliefs were carried out. During the study important tribal localities, pilgrim places and other biodiversity-rich areas of the Raisen forest division were visited to identify existing sacred natural places. The entire zone of examination was thoroughly reviewed and surveyed by repeated visits in different seasons including pre- monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon. The SNS was selected based (Table-1) on the importance of that particular area, its special significance and the diversity of plants found in that area. Ethno-botanical data were collected from ethnic communities, local inhabitants and tribal people,

Priest, Bhagat, Bhumika, etc. Before the administration of questionnaires, conversations with the informants were held with the assistance of a local development agency working in the study area to elaborate the objectives of the study and to build on trust with the common goal to document and preserve the knowledge on medicinal plants. Each sacred site was studied individually to document detailed information. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires of traditional healers, local medicine men and ozs and tribal people were performed to collect valuable information about the medicinal values of mentioned plants. The plants with medicinal values, as known by local people and rural persons were collected and studies were made to know their medicinal and other uses by consulting the relevant literature.

Table 1: Location/Village and devoted Deity of Sacred Natural Sites from Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh.

S. No	Name of SNS	Village	Tehsil	Devoted Deity
1	Bhojpur Shiv temple	Bhojpur	Goharganj	God shiva
2	Shantinath Digambar Jain temple	Bhojpur	Goharganj	Matunga Acharya
3	Parvati cave temple	Kiratnager	Goharganj	Mata Parvati
4	Ashapuri Bhootnath Temple	Ashapuri	Goharganj	Hanuman
5	Bhimbetka	Bhiyapur	Goharganj	Vaishno Mata Temple
6	Keri Ke Mahadeo	Ratapani wildlife sanctuary	Goharganj	God Shiva
7	Hinglaj Temple	Badi	Bari	Hinglaj Mata
8	Dargah Raisen	Raisen	Raisen	Hajrat pir fateh ullah shah chisti baba
9	Sanchi stupas	Sanchi	Raisen	Bhagban Budhha



Fig 1: Bhojeshwar temple



Fig 2: Digamber Jain temple



Fig 3: Ma Parvati cave



Fig 4: Vaishno Devi temple



Fig 5: Keri Ke Mahadev



Fig 6: Bhootnath temple bhimbetka



Fig 7: Ma Hinglaj Temple



Fig 8: Peer Fateh Ullah



Fig 9: Sanchi stupa

Observation

Table 2: Sacred plants and their medicinal values

S. N.	Local name	Botanical name	Family	Life form	sacred	medicinal values of plants
1	Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> (L.) Correa	Rutaceae	Tree	Lord Shiva	Peptic ulcer, diarrhea, constipation, respiratory infections, jaundice
2	Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss.	Meliaceae	Tree	Goddess Sheetala Mata	Leaf juice (10 ml) mixed with a cup of water is given orally once a day before breakfast for 7 days to prevent miscarriage.
3	Palash	<i>Butea monosperma</i> (Lam.) Taub.	Fabaceae	Tree	Ram	Red gum is used in the treatment of diarrhea. Seeds are internally administered as an anthelmintic in treatment.
4	Madar	<i>Calotropis procera</i> (Aiton) Aiton	Asclepiadaceae	Shrub	Mahadeo	It is used in common diseases for example fevers, rheumatism, cough, cold, and asthma.
5	Narial	<i>Cocos nucifera</i> L. Ln.	Arecaceae	Tree	all	Coconut water cooling, diuretic, nutritive, aphrodisiac used in dysentery and diarrhea
6	Doob	<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> (L) Pers.	Poaceae	Herb	Lord Ganesh.	The extract of the plant is used to cure nasal bleeding, cough & menstrual.
7	Datura	<i>Datura metal</i> L.	Solanaceae	Shrub	Lord Shiva	The plant is used in headaches, dropsy, and madness rheumatism, cramps syphilis, pimples, epilepsy, orchitis and mumps.
8	Amla	<i>Emblica officinalis</i> Gaertn.	Euphorbiaceae	Shrub	Lord Vishnu and Shiva	It is used to control body elements (Pitta, Vata, and Kapha) in constipation, the main constituents of Triphala powder.
9	Bar gad	<i>Ficus baghalensis</i> L.	Moraceae	Tree	Bada deo	Pains, ulcers, skin burn A spongy sugar cake (Batasa) filled with latex (4 drops) is eaten once a day in the morning after breakfast for 20 days to cure spermatorrhea.
10	Pipal	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> L.	Moraceae	Tree	Triad – Brahma, Vishnu & Mahesh (Shiva)	Diabetes, liver diseases, migraine, epilepsy, tuberculosis, gonorrhoea, chickenpox, cardiac edema, Scabies, leucorrhoea
11	Gudhal	<i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i> L.	Malvaceae	Shrub	Durga	A decoction is used to treat Bronchitis, coughs, fever, high blood pressure and the prevention of constipation.
12	Aam	<i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	Anacardaceae	Tree	all	Powder of seed used in diarrhea locally people used milk and mango pulp for weight gaining.
13	Moulshree	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> Linn	Sapotaceae	Tree	Lord Krishna	Leucoderma, Fever, Headache, cephalgia
14	Kela	<i>Musa paradisiacal</i> L.	Moraceae	Herb	Lord	Fruits are taken with milk as a remedy for body weakness

					Brihaspati	
15	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Herb	Goddess Lakshmi	Used to treat common cold, asthma, bronchitis fever
16	Shami	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i> (L.) Druce	Fabaceae	Shrub	God Sani	Mainly used in bronchial asthma, stomatitis loose motion, herpes and leucorrhoea.
17	Asok	<i>Saraca asoca</i> (Roxb.) De Wilde	Fabaceae	Tree	Kama Deva	Menstrual disorder and renal calculi
18	Peeli Kaner	<i>Thevetia peruviana</i>	Apocynaceae	Shrub	Lord Shiva	Bark paste is used against skin diseases.
19	Ber	<i>Zizyphus jujuba</i> Mill. m	Rhanaceae	Tree	Lord Shiva	The fruit pulp is mixed with a pinch of salt and chili powder to get relief from indigestion.

Sacred Value

1. ***Aegle marmelos* (L.):** The plant occurs near the temples and cherishes. The leaves are used in offering to please Lord Shiva every Monday, Mondays in the month of Shrawan and Shivratri festival. The leaves are used in enchantments and twigs are used for the sacred fire. The three leaflets resemble Trishul or the trident in the Bel

tree. They are considered symbolic of the creation, preservation and destruction of the powers attributed to the three Lords of the Indian trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. The fruit is worshiped in many Hindu houses. Lord Venkateswara also worshipped with *Aegle marmelos* leaves on Friday (Table-2).

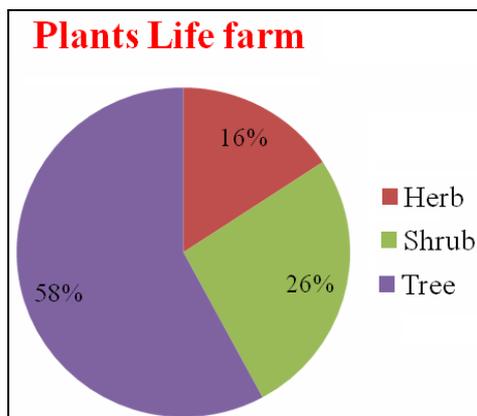


Fig 1: Documentation of medicinal plants according to their Habit

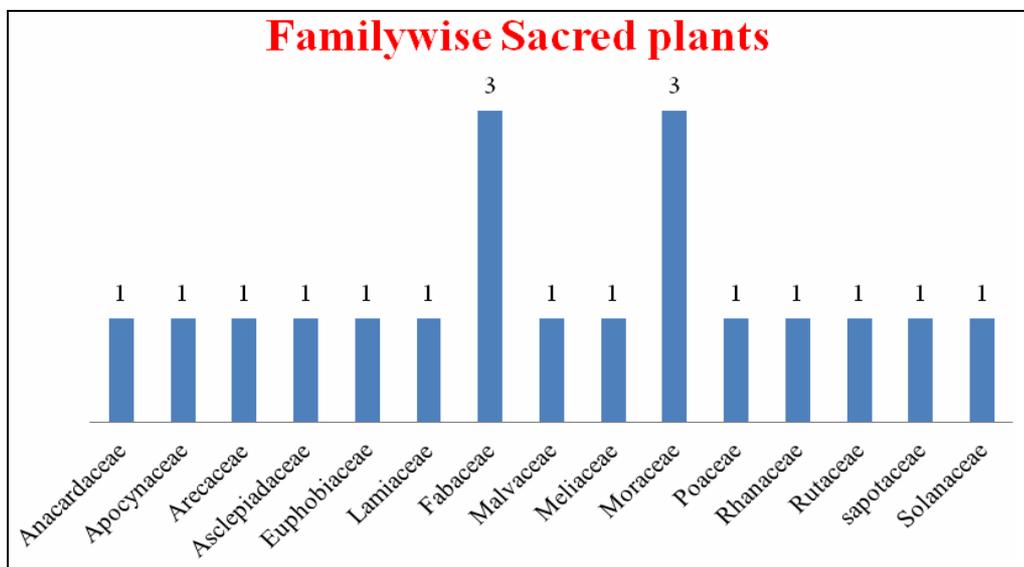


Fig 2: Sacred plants belonging to different families.

2. ***Azadirachta indica* A. Juss:** It is associated with Sheetla Mata (Cool one) - the goddess of smallpox. It is believed that the Sheetla Mata lives in this tree. The leaves of this tree are used in the treatment of a person who suffers from smallpox. He is fanned by the leafy twigs of this tree. Furthermore, the leaves are used in several methods to lessen and relieve this disease. There are many folksongs, folktales and folk proverbs in which an inspiring appeal is made to the Sheetla Mata to free the patient from smallpox (Table-2).

3. ***Butea monosperma* (Lam.):** The plant represents the planet Moon or Chandra and is planted in a southeast direction. This tree’s spoons and ladles are used in Hindu rituals to pour ghee onto the fire. Its trifoliated leaves depict the holy trinity of Vishnu, Brahma, and Mahesh (Table-2).

4. ***Calotropis procera* (Ait.) R.Br:** The flowers are used in the worship of Mahadev and Lord Hanuman. On every Saturday Leaves are made into Garland and offered to Maruti (Lord Hanuman) The plant is regarded to be the

transformation of the Sun as mentioned in Skand Purana. When bark and thin wood over the root is peeled off one will see an image of Ganpati below it. This is called "Swetark Ganpati" It is an aid that where the Ganpati is available to house remains free from all evils (Table-2).

5. **Cocos nucifera L. Ln:** The coconut is considered by Indians to be the fruit of aspiration, and a guarantee of auspicious beginnings. A coconut is split at the inauguration of any Indian function, from the launching of a ship to the first take of a movie spectacular, to invite the blessings of the gods (Table-2).
6. **Cyanodon dactylon (L.):** The fresh tender short and erect culms are used in various rituals of worship like marriage, Hawan-Yagya, Mokh, Bashduwa, etc. The beginning of the marriage ceremony is also marked by the offering of the shrub by the bride's family to the family of the groom. It is of utility in almost every ritual. In old days men (Dogras) used to decorate their turbans with this grass (Table-2).
7. **Datura stramonium (L.):** It is used during the worship of Lord Mahadev. It is also known as Shivapriya, flowers are used in worshipping Lord Shiva (Table-2).
8. **Phyllanthus emblica L.:** It is worshipped by women especially in the month of Kartik (October–November) with a view to be favored with male progeny. On the ninth day of the bright half of the month of Kartik which is known as Akshaya Navami (the immortal ninth)-a special offering is made to this tree. On this day Brahmanas are fed while sitting under the shadow of this tree. This brings unlimited Punya (fortune) to the host. In absence of big trees, saplings are used for this purpose. It is also believed that eating food under the Amala tree in the month of Kartik absolves one from the Anna doshas for a year (Table-2).
9. **Ficus benghalensis L.:** Hindu mythology says that Brahma was transformed into a Vat tree and it is viewed as the male to the peepal. It is considered a sin to destroy both the trees especially the male. The dry twigs of the tree are used as Samidhas for producing sacred fire. The women folk worship this tree on Jeshth Shudh 15th (May to June), to water it, to wind a thread around it to worship it with Genda (Indian marigold) flowers (Table-2).
10. **Ficus religiosa L.:** The plant represents the planet Jupiter or Guru and is planted in a northeast direction. Hindus regard the peepal tree as sacred. Lord Brahma is represented by the roots of the *Ficus religiosa* trees, Lord Vishnu by the trunk of the *Ficus religiosa* tree, and Lord Shiva by the leaves of the *Ficus religiosa* tree. On Saturday people water the tree since it is believed that Vishnu and Laxmi reside on the tree. Worshippers of the tree are blessed with prosperity and a good name (Table-2).
11. **Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L.:** This flower is used to offer Lord Ganesha. A famous couplet in praise of the Sun God begins '*Japaa Kusuma Sankaasam*'. The glowing complexion of the orange-skinned Hanuman is also compared to this flower. Japa flowers are used in the worship of Goddess Durga (Table-2).
12. **Mangifera indica L.:** It is symbolized in Hindu mythology as a wish-granting tree and a symbol of love and devotion. Kalidasa mentions it as one of the arrows of the Kama, the god of love. It is supposed to be an incarnation of Prajapati, the Lord of all creatures. It is believed that Shiva married Parvati under a Mango tree. So marriage pandals are festooned with strings of mango leaves. Mango blossoms are used on Basant Panchami day in the worship of Goddess Saraswati. The wood and twig are used in sacred fires (Table-2).
13. **Mimusops elengi Linn:** Moulshree in Vrindavan Lord Krishna is said to have played his flute under Bakul trees attracting young women and the milkmaids used to get attracted towards the sound of the flute. Even today, Bakul flowers are offered during the worship of Lord Krishna. The ancient poet Kalidasa mentioned the Bakul tree in his creation Meghdoot (Table-2).
14. **Musa paradisiaca L.:** This is the sacred plant worshipped mainly on Thursday. This plant is associated with Lord Brahaspati and Lord Vishnu. During Durga puja, a young plant dropped with a new Saari is worshipped as a symbol of Navpatrika. The stem is used to make pavilions during various sacred rituals. The fruit is offered to Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi for happy married life. The Banana plant is considered sacred to the ninth form of the Hindu goddess Kali. Just as the leaves of a Bel tree are customarily offered to Lord Siva, it is believed that the offering of the leaves of a banana pleases Lord Ganesha (Table-2).
15. **Ocimum sanctum L.:** It is an annual under shrub planted by Hindus in almost every house. The plant is worshiped in the morning and evening as well. A special ceremony/ritual is also performed on a special day (Ekadashi of Kartik Shukla Pakh) to mark the wedding of Tulsi with Lord Rama. It is well decorated on the day and the ritual of marriage is performed by the singing of folk songs by women. The leaves make one of the constituents of Charnamrit. Leaves or fruits are also added to the offerings to Lord Vishnu (Table-2).
16. **Prosopis cineraria L.:** Shami is a sacred tree. The sacred tree is considered an intuitive form of mother Parvati, because through mainly used in bronchial asthma, stomatitis loose motion, herpes and leucorrhoea (Table-2).
17. **Saraca asoca Roxb.:** The Ashoka tree gets a mention in the epic Ramayana as the "Ashoka Vatika" (garden of Ashoka trees) where Hanuman first meets Sita. Meaning the "sorrow less tree", Sita spent her sorrowful days under an Ashoka tree in Ravana's garden after being abducted by him. The Hindus worship this tree because it is dedicated to "Kama Deva" (God of Love). Ashoka is also worshipped especially in Durga Ashtami (Table-2).
18. **Thevetia peruviana L.:** The Flower is offered to God and Goddess during Worship. It is a toxic flower immensely liked by Shiva, therefore used as an offering during worship (Table-2).
19. **Zizyphus jujuba Mill.:** Ber, It symbolizes Lord Shiva. Ber is viewed with reverence by the Sikhs because Guru Nanak Dev planted a sampling of it on the banks of the river (Table-2).

Result and discussion

The nine sacred natural sites such as Bhojpur Shiv Temple, Parvati Temple, Digambar Jain Temple, Ashapuri Bhootnath Temple, Bhimbetika, Keri Ke Mahadeo, Hinglaj Temple, Dargah Raisen, Sanchi Stupas have studied during the year (2021-22), 19 sacred plants belonging 15 families observed. Before temples were constructed, trees were open-air shrines sheltering the deity, and many were symbolic of the Gods our ancestors linked various gods and goddesses with several plants for their conservation and categorized them as sacred plants. These ancient beliefs reveal that the human relationship with medicinal plants was also helpful in the

conservation of medicinal plant species for their valuable qualities. Many such sacred groves are found in the North-East and the Western Ghats (Gadgil and Vartak 1976a, 1976b). The sacred groves along with the forest belts of South India, which are traditionally managed by village communities, are gradually disappearing. Chandrakanth *et al.*, (2004) had done the work on community-based resource management and socio-economic factors which gradually disintegrate this system. A detailed study of rare and endemic plants in the sacred groves of Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu was done by Sukumaran *et al.*, (2008). A monograph about sacred groves in India was written by Malhotra *et al.*, (2007). In this monograph, the author narrates an overview of sacred groves in India, the biological, and ecological dimensions of the grove, and the threats and opportunities of the grove.

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